

Europe's Mixing Bowl

Integrating minorities will benefit the region

In July 2010, an officer with France's National Gendarmerie shot and killed a Roma man in the small village of Saint-Aignan. According to police, the man was wanted in connection with a burglary and had sped through two police checkpoints, injuring an officer. Two days later, dozens of Roma from a nearby camp, armed with hatchets and iron bars, attacked the local police station and rioted in the streets. BBC News reported that in the aftermath of the riots, French President Nicolas Sarkozy "promised that those responsible for the violence would be 'severely punished,' " and ordered hundreds of illegal Roma camps to be destroyed and many illegal occupants repatriated to their countries of origin. That same day, Muslim youth also rioted in the French city of Grenoble after an ethnic North African armed robbery suspect died in a shoot-out with police.

Sarkozy's crackdown was designed to project a tough law enforcement response to an alarmed public concerned with increasing violence centered in Roma and other ethnic minority communities. Instead it has initiated a contentious trans-European debate over minority rights and integration of ethnic minorities, a debate many in Europe, including civil rights groups dedicated to fighting anti-Roma discrimination, believe has been too long in coming. As Tara Bedard of the European Roma Rights Centre told the BBC: Sarkozy's campaign had finally put Roma issues "at the center of Europe's agenda." However, the debate is relevant not only to the Roma community but also to growing Muslim immigrant communities from Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.

Multiethnic Europe

The first Roma, of Indian descent, arrived in Europe no later than the 14th century and were commonly known as Gypsies because they were believed — inaccurately — to have originated in Egypt. The current Roma population in Europe, estimated at 11 million to 16 million, is the continent's largest and fastest-growing ethnic minority. Roma have suffered various levels of discrimination and abuse throughout centuries of European history. Endemic discrimination, combined with the Roma's insular, self-protective and nomadic culture, led to mutual fear and distrust between the Roma and their host communi-

ties. In modern Europe, Roma continue to experience high unemployment, widespread illiteracy and endemic poverty.

The Roma are a somewhat unusual case study for the failure — or rejection — of cultural integration. Understanding the situation of the Roma minority in Europe and the history of Roma interrelations with majority cultures is essential to "effectively address the profound social, political, and cultural challenges the Roma face in Europe," according to Iskra Uzunova, writing in the *Arizona Journal of International & Comparative Law*. It should also be useful in developing unified European policies on minority rights and integration with regard to more recent groups of immigrants from Asia and Africa.

The modern wave of immigration began as European countries, rebuilding from World War II, sought immigrants to compensate for labor shortages. Like the Roma, they arrived in Europe with cultures, languages and religions that differed significantly from those of ethnic Europeans. Many of these Asian and African immigrants were Muslim, and the first wave came predominantly from Europe's former colonies, with Pakistanis and Bangladeshis moving to the United Kingdom and Algerians moving to France. Germany and the Netherlands also attracted large numbers of Muslim immigrants, from Turkey and Indonesia respectively. Because most early immigrants came for economic reasons and didn't intend to stay, they "had no vision of themselves

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◀ A child eats in the arms of a woman in a camp of Roma people in Villeneuve-d'Ascq, France, a day after their deportation from another camp. The U.N. anti-racism committee urged France to "avoid" collective deportations of Roma.



Roma and Romanian children study together in Darvari, Romania. Roma children suffer from segregation and discrimination in education in many European countries.

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▲ Imams attend a service to inaugurate the new Omar Mosque in Berlin's Kreuzberg district during the inauguration of the Islamic Maschhari Centre. Europe's Muslim population is growing rapidly.



Ozlem Cekic, a newly elected member of the Folketinget, the Danish parliament, poses with her newborn daughter in Copenhagen. Cekic and Yildiz Akdogan, are the first ever female Muslim members of the Danish parliament.

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as Western or European Muslims,” Olivier Roy of the French National Center for Scientific Research said. Integration might have seemed irrelevant to the first generation, but the second and third generations “are here to stay,” Roy said.

Immigrants tend to congregate with others from their home countries, or even hometowns, where they try to re-create social networks and support structures. Esther Ben-David of the *Middle East Quarterly* asserted that this “immigration dynamic” limits interaction with the rest of society, leading immigrants to build insular societies that inhibit cultural integration. In this way, Muslim immigrants partly resemble the Roma, who have maintained an “ethnocentric” separation from predominant European culture. Although this separation helps ease the transition to Europe and limits exposure to discrimination, segregation — voluntary or not — can itself contribute to prejudice and discrimination by inhibiting cross-cultural understanding.

Segregation, discrimination and radicalization

According to the European Union Counterradicalization Strategy, published in 2008, political and cultural factors are most prevalent in radicalization of European Muslim immigrants. Poor political representation is a leading contributor. “The lack of political prospects” can result in a feeling that nonpolitical means are necessary to address grievances. The document also pointed to “marginalization in employment, education and housing, as well as negative stereotyping and prejudicial attitudes.” This leads to alienation and a strengthened attachment to, and perhaps distorted understanding of, native culture and religion. “Integration and Security: Muslim Minorities and Public Policy in Europe and the United States,” a report from Rutgers University, asserted that post-9/11 security initiatives have impeded the integration of Muslim immigrants and led to greater discrimination and alienation. “In effect, extreme security measures have countermanding effects resulting in a ‘security/insecurity paradox’: The struggle for security leads to greater radicalization.”

Ethnic and cultural separation also limits economic opportunity. In Eurozine, Nikoleta Popkostadinova reported that even before the global recession, official Roma unemployment rates ranged from 50 percent to 75 percent in Central and Eastern Europe. The data also show that Roma continue to face discrimination, as Roma unemployment rates are three times those of the rest of the population when adjusted for education levels. The Roma also suffer from discrimination in education, compounding the severity of the problem. Popkostadinova said that in Bulgaria, “a policy of effective segregation has deprived generations of Roma a chance to advance towards equal participation in the labor market.”

Integration failure costs society as a whole, not only the affected minorities. Productivity suffers when the talents of an entire group are withheld from the economy. There is less competition and potential shortages of qualified workers, reducing production and gross domestic product. Bulgarian economists

◀ Headscarves are displayed in a women’s fashion stall at the annual meeting of French Muslims organized by the Union of Islamic Organisations of France. Strictly secular France banned the wearing of Muslim headscarves and other conspicuously religious apparel in public schools, hospitals and government buildings.

Lachezar Bogdanov and Georgi Angelov authored a report arguing that the Roma are an untapped source of economic potential, advocating for investment in education and occupational training.

The economic potential of the Muslim community is also underutilized. The 2005 riots in French Muslim ghettos have been widely blamed on high rates of unemployment among Muslim youth. A 2005 Congressional Research Service Report on integration of European Muslims noted Muslim unemployment rates were up to three times higher than those of the entire population, a discrepancy that suggests discrimination is sometimes involved. Belgian businesswoman Imane Karich, writing in a report by the Centre for European Policy Studies, emphasized that Muslims came to Europe in pursuit of economic opportunity. “The Islamic ethos emphasizes the importance of education, trust and hard work as the main components of economic development,” she said.

Moving forward

Europe continues working to create diverse and integrated societies that include the Roma, Muslims and other ethnic minorities. To “manage diversity” in an increasingly diverse Europe, the European Council initiated the Intercultural Cities program in 2008. Based on the premise that “successful cities and societies of the future will be intercultural,” the program began with 11 pilot cities creating strategies for intercultural integration.

Though integration is uneven, success stories proliferate. Muslims have been elected to parliament in the U.K., the Netherlands, Denmark, France and Germany. After the 2009 elections, the EU Parliament included 11 Muslim members. The Centre for European Policy Studies reported that Muslims are increasingly successful in business and academia, helped by the EU’s Muslim Council of Cooperation in Europe.

Western European nations, struggling with a large migration of Roma from Eastern Europe, have called on Romania and Bulgaria to do more to integrate their Roma citizens. The new EU countries, joined by nongovernmental organizations and Roma rights advocates, look to the EU to create a comprehensive Roma policy. Portuguese State Secretary for European Affairs Pedro Lourtie explained: “Considering this is not just one nation’s issue, the EU must play a part in integrating these groups.”

Bogdanov and Angelov’s report called for a more innovative and proactive approach. They propose to focus on occupational training rather than welfare and support a “short-term increase in government spending to expedite mobilization of the Roma into the labor force.” Romanian Gelu Domenico agreed: “We must change our discourse from the human rights perspective to reasons to invest in Roma communities. We need to make the state aware that labor in the Roma community is cheaper and easier to find than bringing in labor from abroad.”

Education is key to opportunity

Successful integration of ethnic minorities depends on educational systems that have not always treated Muslims and Roma as equal players. A joint report on Roma migration from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe cited “severe under-attainment by Roma at school and the perpetuation of intergenerational under-attainment in schooling via practices of racially segregated educational facilities, arbitrary refusals to enroll Romani children and other similar practices.” A 2006 EU publication titled “Muslims in the European Union: Discrimination and Islamophobia” reported that ethnic minorities do not perform as well in school and are much more likely to leave school earlier.

But integration is a two-way street. Traditionally, many Roma, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, have an ingrained cultural distrust of formal education, which contributes to illiteracy and poverty. Jake Bowers, a British ethnic Roma journalist, pointed out that Roma have traditionally placed little value on formalized education, preferring the freedom of self-education and self-employment. “Education remains a double-edged sword for many Gypsies,” Bowers noted on the Travellers’ Times Online website. “It is valued as a way of learning to read and write, but distrusted because of the ‘cultural pollution’ that comes with it.”

Some European Muslims also view public education as a cultural threat. According to a study by Holger Daun and Reza Arjmand in *Review of Education*: “Often parents who have emigrated from predominantly Islamic areas feel uncertain about the opportunities in their new home countries to foster Muslim values and norms in their children. For many of these parents, Islamic moral training is important, whether it takes place in the formal education system or in non-formal socialization arrangements.”

Job training and education will empower the Roma and Muslim communities in Europe and allow them to realize their economic potential. But to integrate and enjoy the economic opportunities available in Europe, ethnic minorities must acclimate to the societies in which they live, leaders from countries such as Great Britain and Germany reiterated in 2010 and 2011. A European program that successfully integrates a historically insular ethnic group such as the Roma could provide a model for integration of other immigrant groups, reducing the cultural alienation that can lead to radicalization and creating more productive and prosperous intercultural communities. As British Prime Minister David Cameron told attendees at the Munich Security Conference in February 2011, many European countries, by opting for “state multiculturalism,” have inadvertently segregated citizens by ethnicity and religion. “Instead of encouraging people to live apart,” Cameron said, “we need a clear sense of shared national identity that is open to everybody.” □